

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

JAMES BROWN,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:21-cv-836

v.

Honorable Phillip J. Green

IONIA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY,

Defendant.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(c) and Rule 73 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff consented to proceed in all matters in this action under the jurisdiction of a United States magistrate judge. (ECF No. 5.) Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff is presently incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) at the Ionia Correctional Facility (ICF) in Ionia, Ionia County, Michigan. The events about which he complains occurred at that facility. Plaintiff sues the Ionia Correctional Facility (ICF).

Plaintiff alleges that the water in his cell is contaminated and that he has become ill as a result of drinking the water. Plaintiff states that he complained about the water on numerous occasions, but nothing was done. Plaintiff has also filed a supplemental pleading, which includes copies of kites he filed complaining about his water. (ECF No. 10.) In a kite response dated November 3, 2021, Plaintiff was told that the water problem had been addressed and that it was found not to be a threat to health. (ECF No. 10-1.) Plaintiff was given Kaopectate for his upset stomach and an information sheet on chronic diarrhea, and was scheduled to see an RN for evaluation. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff seeks compensatory damages and equitable relief.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails “to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.”

Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (“Threadbare recitals of

the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a “probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not ‘show[n]’—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

III. Prison itself is not a person under § 1983

The only defendant named in Plaintiff's complaint is ICF, from whom Plaintiff seeks \$3,000.00 in compensatory damages. An express requirement of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 is that the defendant be a "person." *See Monell v. Dep't of Social Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658 (1978). ICF is an administrative unit of the Michigan Department of Corrections. Neither a prison nor a state corrections department is a "person" within the meaning of section 1983. *Will v. Michigan Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58 (1989). Furthermore, Plaintiff's claim against this Defendant is barred by the Eleventh Amendment. *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978). That amendment prohibits suits in federal court against the state or any of its agencies or departments. *Pennhurst State School & Hosp. v. Haldermann*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984), superseded by statute on other grounds, 28 U.S.C. § 1367. A state's Eleventh Amendment immunity is in the nature of a jurisdictional defense and may be raised on the court's own motion. *Est. of Ritter v. Univ. of Mich.*, 851 F.2d 846, 852 (6th Cir. 1988). The Supreme Court has squarely held that the Eleventh Amendment bars federal suits against state departments of corrections. *Pugh*, 438 U.S. at 782. ICF is therefore not subject to a section 1983 action. Because Plaintiff does not name any other defendants, his complaint is properly dismissed.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a claim, under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims are properly dismissed, the Court also concludes that any issue Plaintiff might raise on appeal would be frivolous. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). Accordingly, the Court certifies that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: December 30, 2021

/s/ Phillip J. Green
PHILLIP J. GREEN
United States Magistrate Judge